

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 LIBREV 01660 161503Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T LIBREVILLE 1660

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, GB, US
SUBJ: PRESIDENT BONGO REQUESTS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER

1. GABONESE AMBASSDOR TO WASHINGTON MAMBOUKA CALLED ON ME MORNING JUNE 16 TO RELAY MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT BONGO THAT BONGO WANTS TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER BEFORE OAU SUMMIT AT KHARTOUM. BONGO REQUESTED SPECIFICALLY THAT MESSAGE, WHCIH WAS CONVEYED TO MAMBOUKA BY BONGO AT AIRPORT AFTERNOON JUNE 15 AS BONGO WAS LEAVING FOR WHAT WILL APPARENTLY BE EXTENDED WEEKEND AT FRANCEVILLE, BE TRANSMITTED TO ME. ASKED WHETHER BONGO WANTED TO CONSULT WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHAIRMAN OF OAU OR AS PRESIDENT OF GABON, AND WHAT BONGO WANTED TO RAISE WITH PRESIDENT CARTER, MAMBOUKA SAID HE DID NOT KNOW. CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH MESSAGE WAS DELIVERED TO HIM BY BONGO WERE SUCH THAT THERE WAS NO OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN MORE.

2. MAMBOUKA PLANS RETURN TO WASHINGTON EITHER JUNE 22 OR 23, AND WILL CERTAINLY RAISE MATTER WITHDEPT SOON THEREAFTER. HE DOES NOT KNOW WHETHER HE WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE BONGO AGAIN BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE, SINCE NO ONE YET SEEMS TO KNOW WHEN BONGO WILL RETURN FROM FRANCEVILLE, AND IT MAY BE THAT ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HE GETS WILL HAVE TO COME FROM FONMIN

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PAGE 02 LIBREV 01660 161503Z

BONGO.

3. I TOLD MAMBOUKA THAT I OF COURSE WOULD RELAY BONGO'S REQUEST TO THE DEPARTMENT IMMEDIATELY. I WAS FRANKLY DUBIOUS HOWEVER THAT ANYTHING COULD BE ARRANGED ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE KNOWING THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HAS VERY HEAVY PROGRAM WHICH IS OFTEN SET LONG

IN ADVANCE, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO VISITS OF FOREIGN DIGNITARIES. IN ANY CASE, I WAS CERTAINLY IN NO POSITION TO MAKE ANY COMMITMENTS. MAMBOUKA SAID HE HAD NOW BEEN AROUND WASHINGTON LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT, THEN PROMISED TO LET ME KNOW IF HE LEARNED ANYTHING FURTHER BEFORE HE LEFT FOR WASHINGTON.

4. COMMENT: SINCE BONGO HAS GIVEN ME NO INKLING THAT HE WANTED MEET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER, I SUSPECT HIS DESIRE TO DO SO IS RATHER SPUR OF MOMENT STIMULATED BY PRESENCE OF MAMBOUKA HERE AND PERHAPS BY ROLL-UP OF ALCE LIBREVILLE TODAY. AT THIS POINT, I CAN ONLY SPECULATE WHAT BONGO WOULD HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH BY SUCH MEETING SINCE HE RISKS LAYING HIMSELF OPEN TO CHARGES AT KHARTOUM FROM THOSE OPPOSED TO HIS LEADERSHIP, THAT HE FELT IT NECESSARY TO GET LAST MINUTE INSTRUCTIONS FROM WASHINGTON BEFORE PROCEEDING TO SUMMIT PARTICULARLY ON ISSUES SUCH AS HIS SUPPORT FOR INTER-AFRICAN FORCE IN SHABA WHICH LIKELY PROVE CONTENTIOUS. COMMITTED AS HE IS, HOWEVER, TO INTER-AFRICAN OR FRANCO-PHONE AFRICAN FORCE, THIS MAY NOT BOTHER HIM. FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW, WE WOULD HAVE TO CONSIDER SAME RISK. AT SAME TIME, I NOTE DEPARTMENT'S DESIRE (STATE 150529) (REINFORCED BY STATE 153145, JUST RECEIVED) TO SET IN MOTION CONSULTATIVE PROCESS ON PROBLEMS OF SHABA AND PROGRESS TOWARD SUBSTITUTION OF ZAIRIAN TROOPS A/O REPLACEMENT OF PRESENT AFRICAN TROOPS BY COMPETENT FORCES UNDER
SECRET

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PAGE 03 LIBREV 01660 161503Z

OAU AEGIS. BONGO-PRE CARTER MEETING MAY BE RATHER HIGHER LEVEL CONSULTATION THAN DEPARTMENT HAD IN MIND, AND KHARTOUM SUMMIT MAY BE TOO SOON FOR CONSULTATIVE PROCESS TO MATURE. NONETHELESS, WE COULD EXPECT BONGO TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION ANY THOUGHTS WE MAY HAVE IN ANYTHING HE SAYS AT KHARTOUM, PARTICULARLY IF THEY WERE CONVEYED DIRECTLY TO HIM BY "HIS GOOD FRIEND" PRESIDENT CARTER, AND WE THEREFORE PERHAPS OUGHT NOT TO OVERLOOK THIS OPPORTUNITY.

5. I, OF COURSE, AM AWARE THAT BONGO HAS ALREADY MET TWICE WITH PRESIDENT DURING HIS TERM OF OFFICE AS PRESIDENT OF OAU, WITH RESULT THAT IN PRINCIPLE THERE LIKELY BE STRONG RESISTANCE IN WASHINGTON TO THIRD MEETING. I CANNOT HELP BUT REFLECT, HOWEVER, THAT IF WE ARE SERIOUS IN OUR DESIRE TO INCREASE AND DEVELOP CONSULTATIONS WITH OAU NOW AND IN FUTURE, AND GIVEN PERCEPTION FROM HERE THAT AFRICAN PROBLEMS ARE LIKELY PLAY AN INCREASING ROLE IN OUR FOREIGN POLICY, WE OUGHT NOT TO TURN DOWN OUT OF HAND AN INITIATIVE FOR CONSULTATION ORIGINATING WITH PRESIDENT OF OAU HIMSELF.

6. ONE FINAL POINT NEEDS TO BE MADE. TIMING OF REQUEST

ON FINAL DAY OF ALCE OPERATION IN SUPPORT OF SHABA
OPERATION MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ENTIRELY COINCIDENTAL.
GABONESE HAVE OFFERED US THEIR FULL COOPERATION IN PER-
MITTING USE OF THEIR FACILITIES FOR REFUELING MIX OF
C-141S AND C-5S. WE HAVE NO ACCURATE FIGURE, BUT ESTIMATE
PERHAPS 65 SORTIES TOUCHED DOWN HERE. ACCEPTING THAT
GABONESEBKOOPERATION WAS IN PART SELF-SERVING SINCE WE
TRANSPORTED THEIR TROOPS, THEIR PERFORMANCE WAS NONETHE-
LESS OUTSTANDING. SINCE THERE ARE PRECIOUS FEW WAYS
THAT WE CAN TANGIBLY EXPRESS OUR APPRECIATION, DEPT MAY
WISH CONSIDER FACT THAT A FAVORABLE RESPONSE TO THIS REQUEST
WOULD HELP BILATERAL RELATIONS CONSIDERABLY.

7. IN ANY CASE, WHILE I WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 LIBREV 01660 161503Z

PRELIMINARY REACTION SOONEST, I RECOMMEND WE DO NOT
REACT OFFICIALLY UNTIL WE KNOW MORE ABOUT PURPOSE OF
PROPOSED VISIT AND/OR UNTIL MAMBOUKA HAS CHANCE TO
MAKE HIS OWN PITCH AFTER HIS RETURN TO WASHINGTON.
IF BONGO RAISES MATTER WITH ME BEFORE THEN, I WOULD
PROPOSE STICKING TO LINE I HAVE ALREADY MADE TO
MAMBOUKA WHILE TELLING HIM I HAVE OF COURSE TRANSMITTED
HIS REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT.TIENKEN

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